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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HONG KONG 001853

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [CH](#) [HK](#)  
SUBJECT: HONG KONG GOVERNMENT KICKS OFF PUBLIC DEBATE ON  
DEMOCRACY OPTIONS

REF: A. HONG KONG 1832  
[1](#)B. HONG KONG 1534  
[1](#)C. HONG KONG 1777

Classified By: E/P Chief Laurent Charbonnet. Reasons: 1.4(b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Hong Kong Government released a "green paper" on July 11 to kick off a three-month public consultation period on the timeframe and roadmap for the implementation of universal suffrage for future Chief Executive (CE) and Legislative Council (Legco) elections. The HKG's proposal offers the public numerous multiple-choice options on technical issues including the size of the CE nominating committee and whether to implement "one man, one vote" in the Legco elections in one step or in stages. A democratic lawmaker asserted that the green paper was too complicated and would "confuse rather than clarify the situation"; pro-government politicians, on the other hand, were generally supportive of the government proposal for clearly laying out all of the questions that needed to be addressed. One former senior HKG official told us that Beijing will not consider universal suffrage until 2017 at the earliest, and will use the consultation process and the debate over a CE screening mechanism to squeeze the democrats. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Faced with skeptical pro-democracy activists, a public unfamiliar with democratic processes and pressure from Beijing, the HKG will be hard-pressed to manage this consultation process to a successful consensus conclusion. The Government also must prove its sincerity and objectivity as it simultaneously solicits and molds the public's views. Further, the pan-democrats must overcome long-standing divisions and form their own "consensus" response to the government's green paper. Pro-Beijing activists likewise will have to prove they are keeping Hong Kong's -- and not Beijing's -- interests at heart. With District Council elections looming in November, the pan-democrats, the government and Beijing may be willing to postpone the final decision on electoral reform until well after the election. End comment.

So Many Options, So Little Time  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) The Hong Kong Government released a "green paper" on July 11 to kick off a three-month public consultation period on the models, timeframe and roadmap for the implementation of universal suffrage for future Chief Executive (CE) and Legislative Council (Legco) elections (reftel a). Only days before the release of the green paper, the media speculated that the government would offer the public a limited number of concrete proposals on what form universal suffrage might take; several contacts had predicted

to us that the government would offer a maximum of three "mainstream" options. Instead, the HKG in consultation with the Commission on Strategic Development (CSD) -- which has been working on the question of electoral reform since November 2005 -- submitted a smorgasbord of "options" on key variables for the direct election of the CE and Legco, without indicating any preferences.

14. (SBU) The green paper offers, in essence, multiple-choice options (the "South China Morning Post" calculated that the public has a total of 486 "possible combinations of answers") for the implementation of universal suffrage, including:

(1) Size of the CE nominating committee: (a) less than 800 members, (b) 800 members, or (c) 800-1,600 members;

(2) Nomination threshold and total number of CE candidates: (a) 10 candidates or more, (b) eight candidates at most, or (c) two to four candidates at most;

(3) Timetable for universal suffrage in CE elections: (a) 2012, (b) 2017, or (c) after 2017;

(4) Roadmap: (a) implementation of universal suffrage for the CE election should precede that for the Legco election, (b) implement universal suffrage in both elections in one step, or (c) implement universal suffrage in stages;

(5) Reform the functional constituencies in the Legco: (1) replace them with geographical constituencies, (2) retain them but change the electoral method, or (3) increase the number of Legco seats reserved for district councils; and

(6) Timetable for universal suffrage in Legco elections: (a)

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a fully elected legislature in 2012, (b) by stages in 2016, or (c) by stages after 2016.

Mixed Response

15. (SBU) Press coverage suggests that some members of the pan-democratic camp were put off by the complexity of options. Lee Cheuk-yan, General Secretary of the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions, derided the green paper as "a jigsaw puzzle for the public." Albert Ho, Chairman of the Democratic Party, asserted that "the government is trying to complicate the issue of universal suffrage. It intends to confuse rather than clarify the situation and make it more difficult for Hong Kong people to make an informed choice." The response from pro-Beijing leaders, however, has been generally positive; Tam Yiu-chung, Vice Chairman of the pro-Beijing Democratic Alliance for the Betterment and Progress of Hong Kong (DAB), welcomed the paper and said during a radio interview that the green paper "offered the public choices and clearly laid out the questions that needed to be addressed."

Beijing's Influence Growing

16. (C) Former Chief Secretary Anson Chan told the Consul General that she believes Beijing will not consider universal suffrage until 2017 at the earliest, and will use the consultation process and the debate over a CE screening mechanism to squeeze the democrats. The central government may have concluded that their supporters in Hong Kong now have enough influence and confidence that Beijing can stare down the opposition, and that most Hong Kong residents won't really care that much. Chan was pessimistic about the consultation process, though she still held out some hope that CE Tsang would seek the "best outcome" for Hong Kong rather than just spinning the Hong Kong people to get them to accept an outcome dictated by Beijing. She thought it more likely, however, that the government would conclude that the

outcome desired by Beijing is in fact the "best outcome" for Hong Kong.

¶7. (C) Chan still hopes to influence the molding of a Hong Kong proposal, and will remain in Hong Kong throughout the summer to work within the consultation process. She questioned the government's sincerity in resolving the issue of political reform, noting Tsang's "status quo" approach to his government and to the Executive Council (Exco). Chan worries that the government, rather than seeking to broaden agreement, will adopt the same "divide and conquer, take it or leave it" strategy as when they presented their reform proposals in 2005 (which Legco democrats rejected and eventually killed). Chan believes that Beijing has decided to tighten control over Hong Kong; recent speeches by National People's Congress (NPC) Chairman Wu Bangguo and President Hu Jintao underscored this message (reftels b, c). The influence and presence of Beijing's Central Government Liaison Office (CGLO) is growing in Hong Kong and CGLO officers are ever-present at public "grassroots" functions including the campaign meetings for District Council elections, said Chan.

#### Building "Consensus" Might Take Time

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¶8. (C) Former Democratic Party Chairman Martin Lee told the Consul General that he and other democrats recently met with Rafael Hui (who served as Chief Secretary until July 1), who claimed that the government had limited the consultation period to three months in order to avoid having it underway during the November 18 District Council elections. But, Hui said, the government would be in no hurry to come out with a proposal and that discussions could continue for some time -- especially through the PRC Party Congress; therefore, an actual HKG proposal might not be released until next year. The HKG would not tackle Legco reforms until after the 2008 Legco elections, Lee thought, believing that time would be on the government's side in weakening the democrats.

#### Government Committed to Progress

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¶9. (SBU) In a briefing to the diplomatic corps on July 12, Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs Stephen Lam

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reiterated the HKG's position that the upcoming consultation period served to aggressively pursue progress, and added that it underscored the HKG's readiness to deal with the democracy

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issue. He said that universal suffrage will improve both the government and the lives of Hong Kong people. The green paper, said Lam, is actually a distillation of more than 300 proposals put forth by the public and Commission on Strategic Development since early 2004. Hong Kong has "no experience" with democracy, but the HKG believes the options for universal suffrage, consistent with the political realities of Hong Kong, have been sufficiently developed to put the question to the public.

¶10. (SBU) He cautioned, however, that the "critical point" in the process will be getting a consensus proposal through Legco. When asked how the public view will be measured, given the benchmark 60% approval rating for any consensus model, Lam expressed hope that "(public opinion) polls will spring up naturally" given that any HKG-sponsored poll would be widely criticized by the opposition as invalid. Responding to a series of questions related to the timetable, Lam endeavored to indicate the HKG's open-mindedness about universal suffrage, possibly as early as the 2012 CE election. He added that the government didn't need to wait until the end of the CE's term to resolve the universal suffrage issue, but rather, "the sooner the better."

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